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Tearmoon Empire
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Tearmoon Empire

Chapter 15

TWO DAYS BEFORE THE TOURNA-MENT

PRINCE ABEL!

HEY THERE, PRINCESS MIA.

ARE YOU HEADING SOMEWHERE?

TMP TMP

MY! ARE YOU, NOW?

I AM, YES.

THE TOURNA-MENT'S COMING UP, AFTER ALL!

I WAS JUST ABOUT TO GO GET SOME PRACTICE IN.

MARVELOUS! WE CAN TALK AS WE WALK, THEN.

HUH? I MEAN, THAT'S FINE WITH ME.

PERHAPS I COULD ACCOMPANY YOU?

ON THAT SUBJECT, I WAS HOPING TO SPEAK WITH YOU REGARDING YOUR LUNCH FOR THE TOURNAMENT!

YOU'LL BE HAND-MAKING LUNCH BOXES?

MUTTER...

FOR PRINCE SION TOO...?

YES! FOR YOU AND FOR PRINCE SION.

OH, HUH...

THE OTHERS AND I WILL BE MAKING THEM TOGETHER.

I'M TERRIBLY SORRY, PRINCE ABEL.

I KNOW THE CUSTOM IS TO ORDER A LUNCH BOX OF THE HIGHEST QUALITY FROM A STORE...

WORSE STILL, OURS WILL BE MADE BY A KITCHEN STAFF OF UTTER AMATEURS!

NO HARM IN APOLOGIZING PREEMPTIVELY, JUST IN CASE THEY TURN OUT SOMEWHAT LESS THAN PALATABLE.

SHOCK

WE'RE MAKING SAND-WICHES!

ESPECIALLY CONSIDERING HOW KEITHWOOD REJECTED **MY** CONTRIBUTION!

AND IT WAS TURNING OUT SO WELL!

SULK

IT WAS **WHAT?**

GLAD...?

ARE YOU, TRULY?

YEAH.

DON'T BE SORRY. I DON'T MIND.

I'M ACTUALLY SORT OF GLAD.

HUH?

IN MY KINGDOM— THE KINGDOM OF REMNO...

...WOMEN TEND TO COOK FOR THEIR HUSBANDS AND CHILDREN. EVEN NOBLEWOMEN, MORE OFTEN THAN NOT.

THAT'S NOT SOMETHING YOU SEE OFTEN IN OTHER COUNTRIES, I'D THINK.

MY MOTHER USED TO MAKE ME LUNCH, SOMETIMES.

BUT, MY MOTHER AND SISTERS PUT THEIR HEARTS INTO MAKING MY MEALS. THAT ALONE MADE THEM SPECIAL.

BASMI

...PRINCESS MIA.

I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.

SO, THANK YOU...

MIA IS STRUCK WITH THE REALIZATION THAT THE BAR FOR HER LUNCH BOX'S QUALITY HAS BEEN RAISED!

HM?

THIS IS **NOT** THE REACTION I EXPECTED!

NOW I CAN'T USE THAT AS AN EXCUSE FOR IT TASTING BAD!

HOW COULD I HAVE ANTICIPATED THAT PRINCE ABEL WOULD BE USED TO EATING HOMEMADE FOOD?

Ah!

WE'VE ARRIVED, PRINCESS MIA!

MUTTER

MUTTER

MUTTER

PERHAPS I SHOULD MAKE SOMETHING MORE ELABORATE AFTER ALL...

RUSTLE

MY...

EXTEND

HEH

I NEVER KNEW THERE WAS SUCH A WONDERFUL PLACE NEARBY!

OH? WELL, I'M GLAD YOU LIKE IT.

YOUR HAND, PRINCESS MIA.

WATCH YOUR STEP.

BA-DUMP

Y-YES, THANK YOU.

*W-WELL, HE **IS** A BOY!*

OFFERING HIS HAND TO A LADY HE'S ESCORTING IS A GIVEN!

FWSSS

SSH

...

BACK WHEN I WAS IN PRISON, I NEVER COULD HAVE IMAGINED I'D EXPERIENCE SUCH A THING.

うっとり

KIRKIRKIRKI

AHH...

TO THINK I'D GET TO WALK ALONG SUCH A LOVELY LAKESHORE WITH A GENTLEMAN BY MY SIDE...

?

WHAT IS?

OH, NOTHING.

I WAS JUST THINKING ABOUT THE LUNCHES YOU'LL BE MAKING.

IN ANY CASE...

...IT IS A BIT OF A SHAME.

IT'S A SHAME I CAN'T BE THE ONLY ONE WHO GETS ONE.

BOMM

HUH...?

HAS HE ANY IDEA WHAT HE JUST IMPLIED?!

WHAT IN THE MOONS IS HE SAY-ING?!

WH—

WHA—

C-CALM! I MUST STAY CALM!

I-I KNOW!

DEEP BREATHS! THAT SHOULD HELP!

A LAKESIDE RENDEZVOUS WITH A WONDERFUL GENTLEMAN...

WHISPERING SWEET NOTHINGS...

BMP

BMP

BMP

BMP

MIA DREAMED OF SUCH SITUATIONS TIME AND AGAIN THROUGHOUT HER IMPRISONMENT.

FACED WITH THE REAL THING, HOWEVER, SHE FINDS HERSELF WOEFULLY UNPREPARED AND PANIC-STRICKEN.

ARE YOU TIRED, PRINCESS MIA?

GASP

HEAVE

RUSTLE

IN THAT CASE...

I SEE... MY APOLOGIES.

Y—

Y-Y-YES, I SUPPOSE SO!

UH—

UMM!

HUH?!

SPREAD

ひろま

YOU SHOULD SIT DOWN AND REST FOR A MOMENT.

TH—

THANK YOU KINDLY.

I'M SURE THIS WON'T BE VERY INTERESTING TO WATCH, SO FEEL FREE TO HEAD BACK ONCE YOU FEEL BETTER.

WHOOSH

HAH HAH.

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE I'VE PRACTICED THIS FRANTICALLY.

YOU'RE TAKING THIS VERY SERIOUSLY, AREN'T YOU?

...?

AFTER ALL...

...I HAVE SOMEONE I WANT TO BEAT, NO MATTER WHAT IT TAKES.

OH?

I SAID IT WAS A SHAME, BUT IN A WAY, I'M A LITTLE GLAD AS WELL.

THAT REMINDS ME. ABOUT THE LUNCH BOX...

IF I WERE THE ONLY ONE WHO GOT TO EAT YOUR LUNCH...

...PEOPLE MIGHT SAY *THAT* WAS THE SOLE REASON I MANAGED TO DEFEAT PRINCE SION!

AND SO THE BAR FOR MIA'S LUNCH BOX'S QUALITY WAS RAISED TO SOMEWHERE IN THE VICINITY OF THE STRATOSPHERE.

HUH?

...

THE MORNING OF THE TOURNAMENT

ALL RIGHT, EVERYONE.

WE'LL BE MAKING OUR SANDWICHES NOW. ARE YOU READY?

YES, SIR!

THE TIME HAS FINALLY COME...

GULP

Hmmm...

...

ALL RIGHT THEN—MISS TIONA, GET TO WORK ON THE VEGETABLES.

NOW THEN, LISTEN CAREFULLY!

I'LL GIVE YOU PRECISE INSTRUCTIONS, SO ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS FOLLOW THEM TO THE LETTER.

I CAN DO THAT!

PRINCE ABEL SAID HE'S ACCUSTOMED TO EATING HOMEMADE FOOD.

—!

*I HAVE TO LIVE UP TO HIS EXPECTATIONS AND PREPARE THE **PERFECT** LUNCH!*

THANK YOU. I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO IT.

キラ SPARKLE

キラ〜 SPARKLE

AND YOU, PRINCESS MIA, CAN PREPARE THE DOUGH.

JUST MAKE IT SQUARE. THAT'S ALL I ASK OF YOU.

THAT'S RIGHT— THIS IS ALL TO SPARE MYSELF THE GUILLOTINE! FOR SURE!

*AND **THAT** WOULD BE DREADFUL!*

IF MY CONNECTION WITH HIM IS SEVERED, I'LL LOSE ALL HOPE OF REINFORCEMENTS FROM REMNO IF THE REVOLUTION OCCURS.

MILADY MIA SEEMS SO MOTIVATED!

I'LL HAVE TO PUT MY ALL INTO THIS AS WELL!

HMPH!

LEAVE IT TO ME!

UNDER-STOOD?

HM?

AH, YES, THE DOUGH!

ALL RIGHT, MISS LIORA. AS WE DISCUSSED, YOU'LL ROAST THE MEAT ***IN THE OVEN.***

ALL...

...RIGHT!

I KNOW IT'S NOT WHAT YOU'RE USED TO, BUT I BELIEVE YOU'LL FIND IT'S ACTUALLY EASIER TO CONTROL THE HEAT.

TAH-DAAAAH

CARVE
CARVE

SCRAPE
SCRAPE

PLUCK
PLUCK

SHE'S COOKING IT.

THAT'S ALL THAT MATTERS. AS LONG AS IT'S COOKED, IT'LL BE EDIBLE.

SIGH...

KEITH-WOOD!

HOW THE MEAT **LOOKS** ISN'T IMPORTANT, ANYWAY.

NEXT UP...

THAT LOOKS GOOD. YOU'RE AS ADROIT AS EVER, I SEE.

HOW'S THIS?

!

SHE, AT LEAST, IS A HELPFUL ADDITION TO THE TEAM.

MOUNTAINOUS

NOW, IF ONLY SHE HAD A SENSE OF **SCALE...**

OH, KEITHWOOD?

WHAT'S NEXT...?

NO, NONE OF THAT—I'LL GIVE MYSELF AN ULCER IF I KEEP FRETTING ABOUT EACH AND EVERY DETAIL.

YES, IT'S ABOUT TIME...

MAY I START BAKING THE BREAD?

...FOR...

GLANCE...

HORSE.

GRAAAH

I TOLD YOU TO MAKE IT A GODDAMN SQUARE!

SPLAT

Remake it!

Ahh!

YOINK

WE ARE MAKING SAND-WICHES!

HOW WILL WE SANDWICH ANYTHING WITH BREAD LIKE THIS?!

...HOW I WOULD LOVE TO ACTUALLY DO THAT.

OH...

EXCITED

BUT HOW DO YOU SAY NO TO A FACE LIKE THAT?

SIGH

YES, THAT SHOULD BE FINE.

WE'LL MAKE IT WORK.

MISS FORK-WOOD?

AND I HAVE AN IDEA...

YES?

WE'LL NEED SOMETHING TO USE AS GLUE, TO BIND IT ALL TOGETHER...

THE CONTENTS WILL SPILL OUT THE MOMENT YOU TAKE A BITE.

OOZE

I'VE READ ABOUT WHITE SAUCE BEFORE! LEAVE IT TO ME.

COULD YOU AND ANNE MAKE SOME WHITE SAUCE?

AH, SAY NO MORE!

THE INGRE-DIENTS SHOULD BE...

IMPRESSIVE. HER KNOWLEDGE RESERVES REALLY ARE SOMETHING.

OH?

OKAY!

ANNE, CAN YOU GATHER UP THE INGREDIENTS I TELL YOU?

WE'LL NEED FLOUR, MILK...

IF ONLY THAT KNOWLEDGE WEREN'T SO DANGEROUSLY UNCONVENTIONAL SOMETIMES!

NO! JUST MAKE A NORMAL SAUCE!

AND THE SECRET INGREDIENT— SALT-PICKLED FISH INNARDS! A TRUE DELICACY...

NOW FOR THE LAST, MOST IMPORTANT STEP.

ALL RIGHT!

SPREAD, AND SAND-WICH!

FILL!

SPREAD!

AND WITH THAT...

...IT'S COMPLETE!

OUR SPECIALLY MADE HORSE-SHAPED SANDWICH!

SMILE

CONGRATU-LATIONS!

HM?

KEITH-WOOD?

PHEW...

WE PULLED THROUGH, SOMEHOW.

!

PLEASE ACCEPT MY THANKS.

YOUR HELP HAS BEEN GREATLY APPRECIATED.

?

NO NEED! I'M NOT THANKING PRINCE SION.

AN HONOR TO BE OF SERVICE.

I'LL RELAY YOUR THANKS TO HIS HIGHNESS.

SHAKE

BOW

WELL, A SERVANT'S DEED IS THEIR MASTER'S CREDIT.

I AM THANKING *YOU*, KEITHWOOD.

SMILE

YOU ARE THE ONE WHO HELPED US MAKE THESE LUNCHES.

THIS IS HOW SHE TOUCHES PEOPLE'S HEARTS.

OH...

I SEE NOW.

BUT SHE HAS NO INTEREST IN THOSE POINTLESS CUSTOMS.

SHE'LL THANK ANYONE WITH UTMOST EARNESTNESS.

Prin-cess Mia!

MOST NOBLES WOULD NEVER DEIGN TO THANK AN ATTENDANT.

THEY'RE JUST TOO PROUD FOR IT.

TRAGICALLY, THIS WAS NOT THE CASE.

HMPH!

PRINCE SION?! AS IF I'D EVER THANK THAT CRETIN!

MUTTER

SHE REALLY IS AN INTEREST-ING ONE...

IF I'D MET HER BEFORE PRINCE SION, I MIGHT BE CALLING HER MILADY.

NEVER IN HIS WILDEST DREAMS WOULD KEITHWOOD GUESS THE TRUTH.

KEITHWOOD PUT ME THROUGH NO SMALL AMOUNT OF SUFFERING LAST TIME, AS WELL...

HARUMPH!

Sion the Idiot

BUT IT WAS ALL HIS DOING, IN THE END!

A SERVANT'S WRONG IS THEIR MASTER'S FAULT!

THE POINTLESS CUSTOMS OF NOBILITY WERE MIA'S BREAD AND BUTTER.

Tearmoon Empire

Chapter 16

A LARGE-SCALE, BIANNUAL EVENT THAT SAINT-NOEL ACADEMY HOSTS EVERY SUMMER AND WINTER.

THE SWORDSMANSHIP TOURNAMENT

CHATTER

CHATTER

Wow!

IT'S SO CROWDED HERE!

IT IS, YES.

IT'S LIKE THE WHOLE TOWN'S MOVED INTO THE SCHOOL GROUNDS.

ANNE?

WOULD YOU MIND PURCHASING A PORTION FOR ME, CHLOE, AND YOURSELF?

RIGHT AWAY, MILADY!

MY! IT DOES, YES!

OH, LOOK AT THAT STALL, PRINCESS MIA!

THE FOOD LOOKS SO TASTY!

HUSTLE

...

HMM

THESE STALLS REMIND ME OF SOME-THING...

THE PREVIOUS TIMELINE

THEY SAY THERE'LL BE DELICACIES FROM ALL ACROSS THE CONTINENT ON OFFER!

YOU'LL TOUR THE STALLS WITH US ON THE DAY OF THE TOURNAMENT, WON'T YOU, PRINCESS MIA?

I HAVE PLANS TO TOUR THE STALLS WITH PRINCE SION, YOU SEE!

OHO HO HO! I'M AFRAID I MUST DECLINE!

YES, THAT'S RIGHT.

OHO HO HO HO HO

SQUEE

I SHOULD HAVE KNOWN!

I'M SORRY I EVEN ASKED! WE WOULDN'T WANT TO IMPOSE.

SQUEE

OH, THAT'S RIGHT! YOU'LL BE BRINGING HIM A LUNCH BOX, WON'T YOU?

SQUEE

Yay!

Yay!

DOOOOOOOOOM

IT NEVER SO MUCH AS CROSSED MY MIND THAT HE MIGHT TURN ME DOWN...

BITTER

AFTER HER LONER LUNCH, MIA TOOK A SOLO TOUR OF THE STALLS.

ぼそ

MUTTER

MUTTER

ぼそ

THANK YOU VERY MUCH!

THANK YOU, ANNE.

SORRY FOR THE WAIT!

ぽか
PIPING HOT

ぴく
PLUCK

PAUSE

はむ
MUNCH

SHOCK

AH...

TO THINK A DAY WOULD COME THAT I COULD TOUR THE STALLS WITH SUCH TRUSTED FRIENDS.

I'M GENUINELY MOVED RIGHT NOW.

I SEE...

PRINCESS MIA! THAT! WHAT YOU JUST ATE!

GUAAAAAAAAH

STREAM

...I'VE BEEN MOVED TO TEARS.

RIGHT NOW, I'M SO HAPPY...

YES, THAT MUST BE IT.

FIRE

AH!

IT—

IT BURNS!!!

EEK

THAT WAS A CRIMSON PEPPER! THEY'RE *REALLY* SPICY!

SPIT IT OUT, QUICK!

WHA?

W—

WATER! YOU NEED WATER!

THERE HAS TO BE SOME AROUND HERE...

EEEEEEEEE

MY NOSE IS ON FIRE!

IT'S SO SPICY!

GLUG GLUG GLUG GLUG GLUG GLUG

HERE.

!

REACH

BWAH

AHHH...

SMILE

I'M FINE NOW. THANK YOU VERY...

...MUCH...

I'M GLAD TO BE OF HELP.

Oh, good.

JUMP

P—

SIDLE

SIDLE

SIDLE

SIDLE

PRINCE ABEL!

...LOOK MORE DASHING TODAY THAN USUAL?

MY...

IS IT JUST ME, OR DOES PRINCE ABEL...

?

BMP

BMP

BMP

BMP

B—

BE STILL, HEART! NO FLUTTERING! I'M BETTER THAN THIS!

BMP

BMP

OH!

?

I'LL GO BUY YOU A NEW ONE AT ONCE!

REACH

NO, IT'S FINE.

HM? OH, YES.

I'M SORRY!

WERE YOU GOING TO DRINK THIS DURING THE TOURNA-MENT?

H-HMM?

DOES HE INTEND TO DRINK FROM THAT BOTTLE?

BUT I JUST DRANK FROM IT! SO IF HE WERE TO DRINK FROM IT NOW, THAT WOULD MEAN... HM? HMMM?

WELL, WELL, WELL. WHAT DO WE HAVE HERE?

THERE'S STILL MORE THAN HALF OF IT LEFT, ANYWAY.

...PRINCE ABEL'S ELDER BROTHER?

AREN'T YOU...

IF IT ISN'T HER HIGHNESS, PRINCESS MIA HERSELF.

NOW, WHAT WAS HIS NAME AGAIN...?

HAH! SO YOU REMEMBER ME, THEN?

I'M ***HONORED,*** YOUR HIGHNESS.

OH, WAS IT, NOW?

HEH

HEH

HEH

WELL, THAT'S... HOW TO PUT IT? ***TERRIBLY*** UNFOR-TUNATE.

BY THE WAY, I'VE BEEN HEARING A RUMOR LATELY.

IT SEEMS YOU'VE PREPARED A LUNCH BOX FOR MY DEAR LITTLE BROTHER?

YES, INDEED. IT WAS MADE WITH THE UTMOST CARE.

...ABEL'S FIRST OPPONENT IS NONE OTHER THAN *ME.*

SPREAD

HM? WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

I MEAN...

...!

HEH HEH HEH!

IN OTHER WORDS, HE'LL LOSE HIS VERY FIRST MATCH.

I BET THAT'LL MAKE THE FOOD GO DOWN NICE AND EASY.

HEH HEH...

NOTHING LIKE A LOSS RIGHT BEFORE A MEAL, RIGHT?

PANIC

あせ

WHAT ARE YOU SAYING? STOP BEING RUDE TO PRprincess MIA, PLEASE!

I GUESS THE SO-CALLED GREAT SAGE OF THE EMPIRE IS JUST A KID AT HEART.

ONE WITH NO TASTE IN MEN.

I HAVE TO ADMIT, THOUGH, I DIDN'T EXPECT YOU TO FALL FOR MY LITTLE BROTHER!

!

SHE HAS THE WISDOM AND SELF-RESPECT NOT TO TAKE INSULTS LIKE THESE LYING DOWN!

SHE'S A SAINT WHO STANDS STRONG AGAINST INJUSTICE!

BUT SHE'S NO PUSH-OVER!

THE PRINCESS MAY BE A WOMAN BLESSED WITH TOLERANCE AND BENE-VOLENCE, YES...

NOTE: FROM ABEL'S PROFOUNDLY DISTORTED PERSPECTIVE.

NOTE: BY ABEL'S STANDARDS.

NOTE: IN ABEL'S OPINION.

SHAKE

SHAKE

...

GLANCE

I'M SURE MY BROTHER'S INSOLENCE HAS MADE HER FURIOUS...

I SEE HE HOLDS ME IN QUITE A GREAT DEAL OF CONTEMPT.

HMMM.

I SUCCEEDED ON THE LATTER FRONT, BUT IF THE FIRST PRINCE VETOES MY REQUEST FOR REINFORCEMENTS, THAT EFFORT WOULD ALL BE FOR NAUGHT.

...AND THE WOMAN WHO HAD THE INDECENCY TO CHOOSE YOUR BROTHER.

BACK WHEN WE MET, I WAS THINKING OF NOTHING OTHER THAN ESCAPING FROM PRINCE SION AND FORGING A CONNECTION WITH PRINCE ABEL.

...AND THEN I CAN COMFORT HIM, AND FORGE AN EVEN FRIENDLIER RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM! TWO BIRDS WITH ONE STONE!

WI NNER

IF PRINCE ABEL LOSES, HIS BROTHER CAN FEEL NICE AND PROUD OF HIMSELF...

IN OTHER WORDS, I MUST TAKE CARE NOT TO BE **OVERTLY** HOSTILE!

AFTER ALL, AVOIDING THE GUILLOTINE COMES BEFORE ALL ELSE!

110 アアアアアアアア SHIIINE

ニッコリ SMIRK

YUP

FRET FRET

HAH HAH.

THIS IS THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE I'VE PRACTICED THIS FRANTICALLY.

AFTER ALL...

...I HAVE SOMEONE I WANT TO BEAT, NO MATTER WHAT IT TAKES.

AS SUCH, I SHOULD JUST MAKE SOMETHING...

Huh?

...UP...

YOUR PALM HAS GROWN RATHER FIRM, HASN'T IT?

AH, YES. THERE'S A SWORDSMANSHIP TOURNAMENT COMING UP, YOU SEE. I'VE BEEN PRACTICING.

HUH...?

SHE STEPPED BACK?

STEP...

PRINCE ABEL.

YOU SHOULD KNOW...

...I AWAIT YOUR VICTORY.

DOES PRINCESS MIA...

...TRULY BELIEVE THAT I'LL WIN?

HUH? THAT'S STRANGE.

WHY WOULD I SAY A THING LIKE THAT?

BUT... WHY?

SHE PROBABLY HAD A THOUSAND WAYS SHE COULD'VE SILENCED MY BROTHER HERSELF.

IF I BEAT HIM, I'LL DEFEND HER HONOR IN THE PROCESS. THAT'S CERTAINLY TRUE.

AND YET...

OH, OF COURSE!

I SEE NOW.

I'VE NEVER BEATEN HIM. NOT EVEN ONCE.

MY BROTHER'S TALENT WITH THE BLADE FAR EXCEEDS MY OWN.

CAN I REALLY DO THIS...?

AH

PRINCE ABEL.

I'M SURE YOUR LUNCH WILL TASTE MUCH BETTER IF YOU'VE JUST WON A MATCH BEFOREHAND!

GRIN

I'M SURE YOU'RE RIGHT ABOUT THAT.

YES... OF COURSE.

SMILE

I SIMPLY CANNOT ALLOW OUR DELICIOUS SANDWICHES TO GO TO WASTE BECAUSE HE WAS TOO BUSY SULKING OVER HIS LOSS TO APPRECIATE THEM!

THAT'S RIGHT!

I ONLY TOLD HIM TO WIN BECAUSE IT WOULD RUIN OUR LUNCH IF HE SPENT THE MEAL DEPRESSED AND GLOOMY!

I'M ABSOLUTELY CERTAIN THAT'S WHAT I WAS THINKING!

HMPH...

GET ALONG WELL, DON'T THEY?

WE WILL NOW COMMENCE THE SEVENTH MATCH OF THE QUALIFIERS!

ABEL REMNO.

GAIN REMNO.

PLEASE STEP INTO THE ARENA!

SHNG チャッ

I CAN'T LET MYSELF LOSE!

PRINCE ABEL...

ALL RIGHT, THEN.

TIME TO TEST HOW MUCH YOU'VE IMPROVED...

...MY DEAR BROTHER.

...!

AH

CLANG

UGH!

AGH...

TREMBLE

SHIING!

HMPH.

WELL, THAT'S ABOUT WHAT I EXPECTED.

CLA

NG

DASH

HE'S SO STRONG!

UGH...

HUH...?

I HAVE TO SAY, YOU'VE FOUND A NICE GIRL FOR YOURSELF, HAVEN'T YOU, ABEL?

GRIND

HEH HEH

I'M SURE FATHER WILL BE GLAD TO HEAR THE NEWS.

HOW'D A WIMP LIKE YOU WOO THE EMPIRE'S PRINCESS?

HAH

I THOUGHT I COULD SCARE HER INTO MINDING HER MANNERS, AND WHAT DO YOU KNOW? I WAS RIGHT ON THE MONEY.

NO!

THAT'S NOT—

AND YOU KNOW...

FWSH

WHAT ARE YOU—

SHE SURE WAS DOCILE TODAY, THOUGH, WASN'T SHE?

SEEMS THE GREAT SAGE OF THE EMPIRE REALLY IS JUST A DUMB KID AFTER ALL.

I'D ONLY NEED A WEEK TO TEACH HER HOW TO BEHAVE.

IF THE TWO OF YOU GET MARRIED, YOU SHOULD BRING HER BACK TO REMNO.

A LITTLE PAIN GOES A LONG WAY. SHE'LL LEARN TO BE NICE AND QUIET IN NO TIME.

THE KINGDOM OF REMNO SKEWED TOWARD CHAUVINISM.

THROUGHOUT HIS LIFE, ABEL HAD BORNE WITNESS TO WOMEN BEING PERSECUTED, ABUSED, AND ASSAULTED.

Please!

I beg of you...!

I beg of you, no more!

FWSH

GAIN.

HEH HEH HEH

YOU'LL BE BETTER OFF IN THE LONG RUN—TRUST ME.

WE'LL HAVE THE EMPIRE AT OUR MERCY.

IF YOU INSULT PRINCESS MIA ONE MORE TIME...

WAVE WAVE

AND WHAT IF I DO?

YOU CAN SAY WHATEVER YOU LIKE ABOUT ME.

MOCK ME. INSULT ME. I DON'T CARE.

BUT...

HM?

RAISE

TWITCH...

THE FIRST STANCE?

A STANCE DEVOTED PURELY TO ATTACK, NOT SPARING THE SLIGHTEST ATTENTION TO DEFENSE.

IT SETS UP A SINGLE, POWERFUL STRIKE, STAKING EVERYTHING ON HITTING YOUR FOE BEFORE THEY HIT YOU.

THE FIRST STANCE OF THE REMNO ROYAL FAMILY'S SWORD FIGHTING STYLE...

WELL... I NEVER EXPECTED BETTER FROM YOU, ANYWAY.

THING IS, THOUGH...

THAT'S THE VERY FIRST MOVE A SWORDSMAN LEARNS! THE MOST BASIC OF THE BASICS!

CLENCH

BREATHE

FA
BAM

I WON'T ALLOW YOU...

...TO INSULT HER ANY FURTHER!

WINCE

WHA...?

HNGH...

GYAAA AAAH!

CLATTER

AND THAT'S THE MATCH!

THE VICTOR...

...ABEL REMNO!

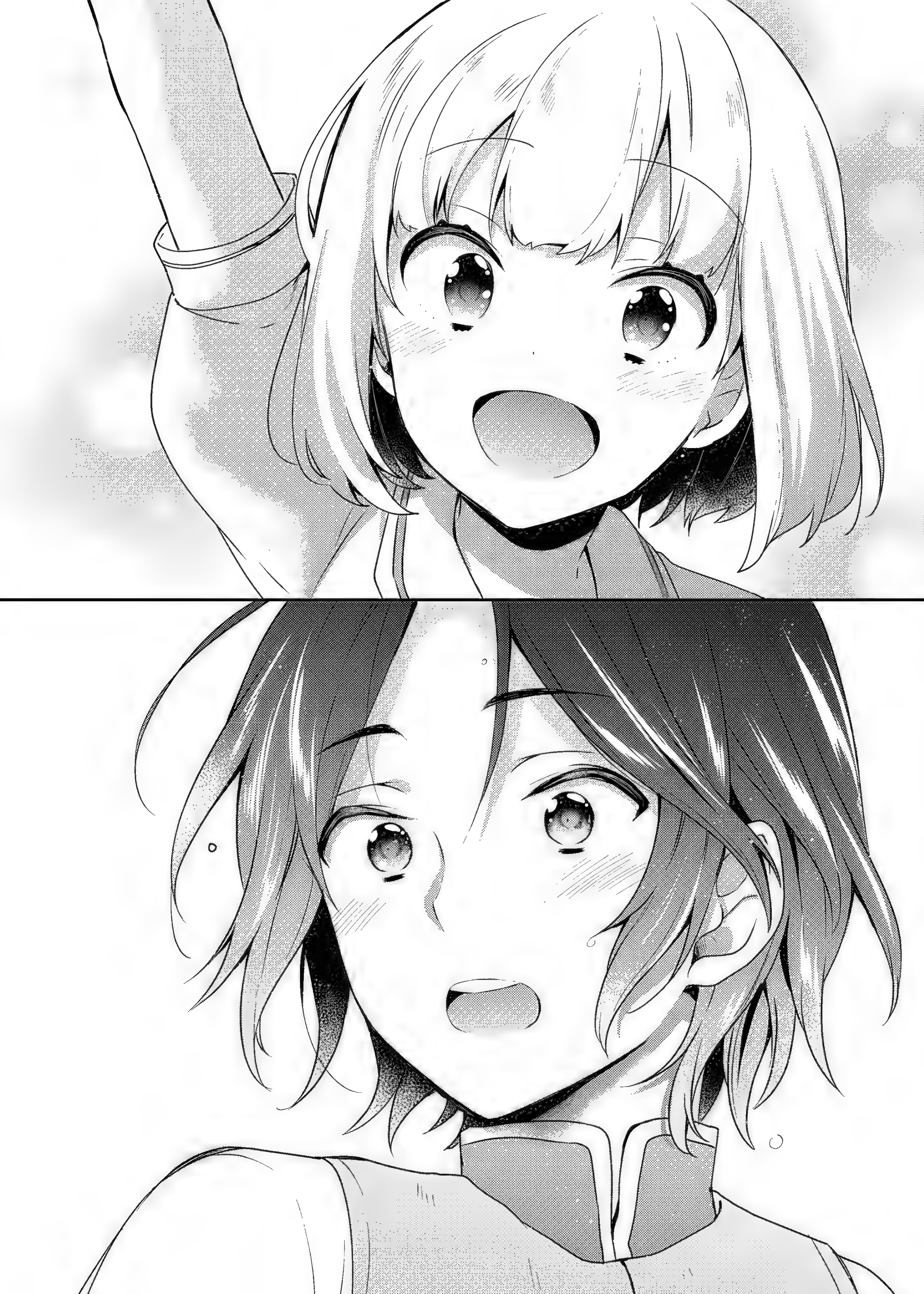
AFTER THREE YEARS!

CHEEE EEER

PRINCE ABEL!

AH

TURN 3



TREMBLE

I...

I WON!

Chapter 17

THE MID-TOURNAMENT LUNCH BREAK

THAT WAS ABSOLUTELY ***AMAZING,*** PRINCE ABEL!

I COULDN'T HAVE DONE IT WITHOUT YOU CHEERING ME ON, THOUGH.

DEFEATING YOUR OLDER BROTHER WAS IMPRESSIVE ENOUGH, BUT THEN YOU BEAT ***TWO*** OLDER STUDENTS AS WELL!

I ***KNEW*** YOU COULD DO IT!

Ha ha!

THANKS.

I HAD NO IDEA!

AND I MUST SAY, YOU REALLY ARE GOOD!

THIS WAS THE FRUIT OF ALL YOUR HARD WORK!

OHO HO HO

OH, DON'T BE SO MODEST!

PRINCE SION, THE WRETCHED MAN WHO SENT ME TO THE GUILLOTINE, IS FIGHTING IN THIS TOURNAMENT...

THIS JUST MIGHT POSE AN OPPORTUNITY.

CLENCH

REALLY, WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT?

ハッ

BEAM

MIA IS ALL ABOUT LETTING OTHERS DO THE DIRTY WORK.

*...AND I MIGHT GET TO KNOCK HIM DOWN A PEG **WITHOUT** EXPOSING MYSELF TO DANGER AT ALL!*

I STILL HAVE TO FACE PRINCE SION, AFTER ALL.

THAT, UH... MIGHT BE AIMING A BIT HIGH.

WHY, YOU MIGHT EVEN WIN FIRST PLACE AT THIS RATE!

MY COURSE IS CLEAR! I MUST CHEER PRINCE ABEL ON WITH ALL MY HEART AND SOUL!

YOU'RE STRONG, I ASSURE YOU.

DON'T WORRY! I KNOW YOU'LL WIN, PRINCE ABEL!

YOU SHOULD BELIEVE IN YOURSELF!

LEAN

PRINCESS MIA...

BA-DMP...

SO, PLEASE...

GIVE THAT GOOD-FOR-NOTHING PRINCE SION A—

HMM?

WERE YOU TALKING ABOUT ME, PRINCESS MIA?

P—

PRINCE SION?!

WH-WH-WHAT IN THE MOONS IS HE DOING HERE?!

?!?

BOING

THEY SHOULD ALREADY BE EATING LUNCH SOMEWHERE ELSE BY NOW...

Leave it to me!

I'M CERTAIN WE GAVE HIS SANDWICHES TO TIONA TO DELIVER!

すら

ALL TOGETHER

...SO WHAT ARE THEY ALL DOING HERE?!

...BLINK はち

TIONA...

HUH?!

LADY RUDOLVON SUGGESTED THAT SINCE YOU HAD A HAND IN MAKING OUR LUNCHES, WE MIGHT AS WELL EAT THEM WITH YOU.

WHAT IS THAT FACE SUPPOSED TO MEAN?!

THUMBS UP!

MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!

CRINGE...

NOTHING OF THE SORT...

I HOPE WE'RE NOT IMPOSING?

N-NO!

JUMP

YOU TURNED ME DOWN TIME AND TIME AGAIN BEFORE, BUT NOW YOU JUST CASUALLY INVITE YOURSELF OVER?!

WHY, YOU LITTLE...

HUFF
HUFF
HUFF
HUFF
HUFF
HUFF

YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW IT FELT EATING ALL ALONE IN THE LAST TIMELINE!

HOW DARE YOU!

SHINE
ぱっ

!

OH, HEY!

WHAT A FUNNY SANDWICH.

I MUST KNOCK HIM DOWN AT LEAST ONE PEG...

URGE
MMGE
MBLE

STARE
じ～

...

FIDGET
もじ

M-MY!

YOU NOTICED?

...AND NOW I'M STARTING TO FEEL A LITTLE NERVOUS.

HE'S LOOKING AT IT! PRINCE ABEL IS STARING AT MY SANDWICH...

MUNCH

GULP

OH!

IT'S A HORSE, RIGHT?

THIS REALLY IS A GREAT SANDWICH.

I KNEW IT—IT'S DELICIOUS!

ぽおおおおBEEEEAMっ

OHO HO HO...

MUNCH

MUNCH

WELL, I'M VERY GLAD TO HEAR IT!

IN SHORT, A COMPLIMENT FOR THE SANDWICH IS NOTHING LESS THAN A COMPLIMENT FOR **ME!**

AND **I'M** THE ONE WHO SUGGESTED WE SHAPE THEM LIKE HORSES!

INDEED, THAT SANDWICH'S MOST DISTINCTIVE FEATURE IS ITS SHAPE!

AND SO, THE MAN WHO PULLED THAT BIZARRE MESS INTO AN ACTUAL SANDWICH WAS SWEPT UNDER THE RUG. FEEL FREE TO CRY, KEITHWOOD.

SHINE!

CAN I HAVE A MOMENT?

♫ OHO HO HO ♫

PRINCE ABEL!

OHO HO HO

I ALSO OWE YOU AN APOLOGY.

?

PRINCE SION! WHAT IS IT?

I WANTED TO CONGRAT-ULATE YOU FOR TRIUMPHING OVER YOUR BROTHER— A LITTLE BELATEDLY, I'LL ADMIT.

OH! WELL, THANK YOU VERY MUCH.

I THOUGHT IT WAS PLAIN TO SEE THAT YOUR BROTHER OUTMATCHED YOU.

WHAT FOR?

FOR THE FACT THAT I WAS CONVINCED YOU WERE GOING TO LOSE.

MIA'S OPINION OF SION DECLINES BY SEVERAL POINTS!

PRINCE ABEL WOULD **NEVER** LOSE TO A BONEHEAD LIKE HIS BROTHER!

MY! HOW **TERRIBLY** RUDE!

I HAVEN'T BEEN MOVING AHEAD IN THE TOURNAMENT BY VIRTUE OF SKILL, LIKE YOU.

I THINK YOUR ASSESS-MENT WAS CORRECT, ACTUALLY.

I ONLY WON BECAUSE I GOT LUCKY.

MIA'S OPINION OF ABEL INCREASES BY SEVERAL POINTS!

MY!

HOW MODEST, PRINCE ABEL!

YOU'VE ONLY BEEN WINNING BECAUSE YOU KEEP GETTING LUCKY!

WELL, THAT GOES WITHOUT SAYING.

MIA IS IN COMPLETE AGREEMENT!

LUCK IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR, PRINCE ABEL.

I COULDN'T HAVE MADE IT THIS FAR ON PURE SKILL.

VALIDATION FROM **HIM** IS NOTHING TO FEEL HONORED OVER!

NO NEED FOR THAT, PRINCE ABEL!

MIA DISAGREES VEHEMENTLY!

IT'S A PRIVILEGE TO HEAR THAT FROM YOU, PRINCE SION.

I'M HONORED.

EXTEND 9

REGARD-LESS...

!

LET'S MAKE OUR NEXT MATCH A GOOD ONE.

OH, THE BONDS OF PASSIONATE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN MEN...

OOOH

SO DREAMY...

HARUUUMPH

NOM はむっ

STOP GETTING IN MY WAY, ALREADY!

"DREAMY"?! HARDLY!

HE JUST HAD TO INTERRUPT RIGHT WHEN PRINCE ABEL WAS COMPLIMENTING MY SANDWICH!

MIA (FORMERLY 20 YEARS OLD) DISPLAYS HER PETTY NATURE.

YES, OF COURSE.

HMPH

STAND

I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH OF A FIGHT I'LL PUT UP...

...BUT I'LL DO MY BEST. IF NOTHING ELSE, I HOPE TO LEARN A LOT FROM YOU.

I KNOW THIS IS A BAD HABIT— PREPARING MYSELF FOR THE DISAPPOINTMENT OF LOSS IN ADVANCE.

?

TUG

AND AFTER I TOLD THE PRINCESS THERE WAS SOMEONE I WANTED TO BEAT, NO MATTER WHAT.

STARE

...!

AH

YOU'RE STRONG, I ASSURE YOU.

DON'T WORRY! I KNOW YOU'LL WIN, PRINCE ABEL!

YOU SHOULD BELIEVE IN YOURSELF!

YOU'RE TELLING ME NOT TO BE SO WEAK-HEARTED...

...AREN'T YOU, PRINCESS MIA?

THAT'S RIGHT. HOW COULD I FORGET WHAT SHE JUST TOLD ME?

SHE BELIEVES IN ME.

TUG

MIA, AS IT TURNS OUT, WAS JUST BEING OBNOXIOUS.

TUG

YOU COULD SPEND A LITTLE LONGER PRAISING MY SANDWICH, YOU KNOW?

I KNOW WHAT I HAVE TO DO.

YOU'D BETTER PREPARE YOURSELF.

GRIP

HM?

PRINCE SION SOL SUNKLAND.

I HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO WIN.

I CAN'T ALLOW HER WORDS TO BECOME A LIE.

I, ABEL REMNO...

...WILL *NOT* LOSE TO YOU.

I CAN'T LET HER FAITH IN ME GO TO WASTE!

SMIRK

OH...? IS THAT SO?

I PROMISE TO CRUSH YOU WITH ALL MY MIGHT.

CHALLENGE ACCEPTED, ABEL REMNO.

GRIP

WONDERFUL...

Ooh...

SPARKLE

SPARKLE

SPARKLE

AND SO, LUNCHTIME PASSES BY.

BUT...WHAT ABOUT MY SANDWICH...?

Tearmoon Empire

IT'S TIME FOR OUR NEXT MATCH!

PRINCE SION SOL SUNKLAND, VERSUS...

...PRINCE ABEL REMNO!

Chapter 18

BEGIN!

CHATTER

I'M NOT SO SURE! PRINCE ABEL MAY BE A FIRST-YEAR, BUT HE'S BEEN WINNING MATCH AFTER MATCH!

THIS WILL BE A BOUT TO REMEMBER!

CHATTER

SURELY HE'LL COME OUT ON TOP?

THEY SAY PRINCE SION'S A PRODIGY WITH THE BLADE!

THAT SIMPLY GOES TO SHOW HOW MUCH ATTENTION THIS MATCH HAS GARNERED.

SO MANY PEOPLE CAME TO WATCH...

THIS IS NOTHING LIKE THE LAST FEW ROUNDS!

Blarf!

...RUB YOUR VICTORY IN THAT BUFFOON'S FACE!

PLEASE, FIND A WAY TO WIN, PRINCE ABEL!

PETTY AS EVER.

CLENCH

WIN, AND THEN...

WHO'D HAVE THOUGHT I'D END UP AT THE CENTER OF THIS MUCH ATTENTION?

CERTAINLY NOT ME.

WELL, THIS TOOK A TURN.

GLANCE...

CHATTER

CHATTER

FWSH...

SHINING

THIS MANDATES THE UTMOST CONFIDENCE IN YOUR ABILITY TO DEFLECT ANY ATTACK AND CATCH YOUR FOE ON THE RIPOSTE.

!

PRINCE SION'S STYLE OF SWORDPLAY IS STRUCTURED AROUND COUNTERS.

AN ORDINARY SWORDSMAN LIKE ME COULD NEVER PULL IT OFF.

HOWEVER...

TWITCH

...

WISH

THE GAP BETWEEN US WILL NEVER SHRINK IF I TRAIN ORDINARILY. IF ANYTHING, IT'LL ONLY GROW.

GENIUS THOUGH HE IS, WORD HAS IT PRINCE SION'S NEVER NEGLECTED HIS TRAINING.

BUT THAT JUST MEANS I HAVE TO NARROW MY FOCUS.

...I'VE SPENT EACH AND EVERY DAY RUNNING THROUGH THE SAME DRILL, OVER AND OVER.

EVER SINCE THE NIGHT OF THE PARTY...

EVER SINCE THAT DAY...

LIGHT

BAM
!
CRA
I'VE PRACTICED JUST ONE THING.
BRINGING DOWN MY BLADE AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE!
SH

CLANG

HAH

IT STILL WASN'T ENOUGH?

AGAIN...?

CLENCH

...!

SCHWING

WSH

SHAKE

TAP

HE...DIDN'T COUNTER MY STRIKE?

...

KA-CHAK

PARDON ME FOR NOT LIVING UP TO YOUR EXPEC-TATIONS...

HEH

...BUT CIRCUM-STANCES SEEM TO BE FORCING MY HAND.

HMPH...

WEREN'T YOU SUPPOSED TO BE COMING AT ME WITH YOUR FULL MIGHT?

IS HE MOCKING ME? NO, IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE IT.

WELL, IN ANY CASE...

...MY REPERTOIRE IS RATHER LIMITED REGARDLESS!

WSH

JUMP

WHOOSH

UGH!

SHIVER...

IF ONLY SION WOULD QUIT LEAPING ABOUT LIKE A LOUSE!

...

AH, THAT WAS SO CLOSE! JUST A LITTLE FURTHER, AND HE WOULD'VE HAD HIM!

WSH

LOOKS LIKE MILORD SION GOT COCKY.

HMM...

BUT IN ANY CASE...

GRANTED, IT'S RARE TO SEE A SWING HE CAN'T PARRY.

TAP

TAP

HE MUST'VE THOUGHT HE COULD HANDLE THAT FIRST STRIKE.

HIS TALENT GOT THE BETTER OF HIM.

NOT THAT I WAS TAKING PRINCE ABEL LIGHTLY...

...BUT THIS IS MORE THAN I WAS COUNTING ON.

...IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE PRINCE ABEL WOULD GIVE HIM THIS MUCH TROUBLE.

WHOOSH

SHUDDER

I ONLY JUST MANAGED TO INTERCEPT IT IN TIME.

THAT FIRST SWING... IT WAS FAR FASTER AND HEAVIER THAN I EXPECTED FROM HIM.

AND THAT WAS THE BEST I COULD DO.

I HAVEN'T FELT LIKE THIS SINCE I TRAINED WITH MY FATHER.

I CAN BARELY KEEP HOLD OF MY SWORD.

PRINCE ABEL REMNO.

HE'S WELL AWARE OF HIS OWN MEDIOCRITY, BUT THAT HASN'T CAUSED HIM TO GIVE UP..

NO—HE'S TAKEN IT INTO ACCOUNT AND WORKED OUT A PLAN TO DEFEAT HIS OPPONENT IN SPITE OF IT.

I SEE HOW IT IS.

HMM...

IF PRINCE ABEL ASCENDS TO THE THRONE, REMNO MIGHT GROW MUCH MORE FORMIDABLE THAN IT IS NOW.

THOSE ARE ABILITIES THAT WILL PROVE INDISPENSABLE FOR THE KINGDOM OF REMNO.

HE KNOWS HIMSELF. HE KNOWS HIS FOE. AND HE KNOWS HOW TO ACCOMPLISH HIS GOAL.

THE ESSENTIAL QUALITIES OF A KING.

チラ GLANCE

THAT BEING SAID...

THE SITUATION WOULD NEVER HAVE REACHED THIS POINT IF IT WEREN'T FOR **SOMEONE'S** GUIDING HAND.

HAAAH!

MY ARMS ARE STILL NUMB.

FNOO

EZOSH

TELL ME SOMETHING, PRINCE ABEL.

WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES YOU SO DETERMINED? IS IT PRIN-CESS MIA?

THAT'S RIGHT.

BE THAT AS IT MAY...

...I CAN KEEP DODGING SO LONG AS I ONLY HAVE TO DEAL WITH THAT OVERHEAD SWING.

IF HE HAD ANY OTHER MOVES TO BREAK UP THE PATTERN WITH, THOUGH...

HMPH...

I WASN'T BORN WITH TALENT, AND NO AMOUNT OF HARD WORK WILL LET ME CATCH UP WITH THOSE WHO WERE.

AND IF THAT'S THE CASE, WHY BOTHER TRYING AT ALL?

ALL THIS TIME, I BELIEVED IT WAS POINTLESS.

UNTIL NOW.

...AND MET HER.

UNTIL I CAME TO SAINT-NOEL...

PRINCESS MIA BELIEVES IN ME. SHE WISHES FOR MY VICTORY.

...I'VE HATED THE THOUGHT OF LOSING TO PRINCE SION.

EVER SINCE THAT DAY...

I'VE WANTED TO SURPASS HIM.

THEREFORE, I CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE!

I WISH I WERE IN YOUR SHOES.

HMH...

IS THAT SO...?

HOW-EVER...

JUST A LITTLE LONGER, AND MY ARMS WILL HAVE RECOVERED.

I CAN DO THIS!

...I CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE EITHER.

RAISE

PLIP

PLIP

PATTER
ハラ…

RAIN...?

OH, JEEZ!

QUICKLY, GET INSIDE!

HOW DREADFUL! WE'LL BE SOAKED!

PRINCESS MIA, WE SHOULD FIND SOMEWHERE TO TAKE COVER!

UMM, WELL, IT'S RAINING!

WE SHOULD MOVE SOMEWHERE ELSE, BEFORE YOU GET DRENCHED AND END UP SICK!

IS SOMETHING THE MATTER, ANNE?

PRINCESS MIA...?

HUH?

OH

OH, IS THAT ALL? A LITTLE RAIN IS OF NO MATTER TO ME.

THE MATCH ISN'T OVER...

...AND I MUST SEE IT THROUGH TO THE END.

はAH

!

OR RATHER, THE MOMENT THAT MISERABLE PRINCE SION IS BEATEN BLACK AND BLUE!

I MUST WITNESS THE MOMENT THAT PRINCE ABEL OVERCOMES PRINCE SION!

THE REST OF US WILL GO FIND COVER IN THE MEANTIME.

WHY NOT FIND AN UMBRELLA TO HOLD FOR HER, MISS ANNE?

BUT PRINCESS MIA...

SHE WANTS TO SEE IT THROUGH, HUH?

INTEREST-ING.

Anne!

GYAAAH!

CRASH

FOCUSED

OH!

RIGHT! I'LL GO GET ONE NOW!

SHE'S PICKED OUT THE POTENTIAL FOR GREAT-NESS THAT SLUMBERS WITHIN PRINCE ABEL...

...AND NOW SHE'S LABORING TO BRING THOSE LATENT TALENTS TO LIGHT!

SHE IS NOT.

THEY CALL HER A GREAT SAGE, AND IF THERE'S EVEN A LICK OF TRUTH TO THAT, SHE KNOWS HOW TALENTED SION IS.

BUT IN SPITE OF THAT, SHE CHOSE PRINCE ABEL OVER HIM AT THE DANCE PARTY, AND SHE DID IT AGAIN TODAY.

THAT COULD ONLY MEAN ONE THING.

IT'S ENTIRELY POSSIBLE THAT THEY COULD BECOME ENEMIES, IN THE LONG TERM.

AND YET STILL, SHE SEEMS PURELY MOTIVATED BY A DESIRE TO NOT SEE A TALENT GO TO WASTE.

BUT WAIT A MINUTE...

THE TEARMOON EMPIRE AND THE KINGDOM OF REMNO AREN'T EVEN **FRIENDLY** WITH EACH OTHER, MUCH LESS ALLIED.

SHE WENT SO FAR AS TO PLEAD WITH RAFINA TO SPARE THE NOBLES WHO HARASSED TIONA FROM EXPULSION.

THE DEGREE OF TALENT DOESN'T SEEM TO MATTER TO HER EITHER.

AND NOW, I HEAR THEY'RE APPLYING THEMSELVES TO THEIR STUDIES IN AN EFFORT TO REPAY HER KINDNESS.

HEE HEE HEE

IF I DON'T APOLOGIZE TO MISS RAFINA, I'LL BE CLIMBING MY WAY TO THE GUILLOTINE BEFORE I KNOW IT!

THE TRUTH.

KEITHWOOD, THE LAST BASTION OF RATIONALITY, FINALLY SUCCUMBS TO A BUDDING ADMIRATION OF MIA.

THIS IS THE TRUE ESSENCE OF THE GREAT SAGE OF THE EMPIRE!

SHE FEELS THE NEED TO MAKE THE TALENTS SHE UNCOVERS BLOSSOM— NO MATTER **WHO** SHE FINDS THEM IN!

BAM!

CLICK

HAAAH!

ATTACK

HE PARRIED IT?!

AH?

UGH!

STOMP

!

!

STAGGER

BAM

SO... YOU'VE FINALLY STOPPED HOLDING BACK, THEN?

THAT SWING OF YOURS REALLY IS SOMETHING, I HAVE TO SAY.

EVEN IF I KNOW IT'S COMING, IT TAKES EVERYTHING I HAVE TO PARRY IT.

NOT QUITE.

I'M NOT SURE HOW I CAN MAKE YOU BELIEVE THIS...

...BUT I'VE BEEN TRYING MY BEST THIS WHOLE TIME.

AND OUT OF RESPECT FOR THE POWER OF YOUR SWING, I'D LIKE TO WARN YOU.

IF YOU TRY THE SAME MOVE ON ME EVEN ONE MORE TIME...

...YOU'RE GOING TO LOSE, PRINCE ABEL.

...THERE'S ONLY ONE THING FOR ME TO DO.

RAISE

ISN'T THERE?

OH...?

IN THAT CASE...

...?

TWITCH

NO. FAR FROM IT.

SHOULD I TAKE THIS TO MEAN YOU SURRENDER?

THIS IS HOW I WIN, PRINCE SION.

IF I TRY TO CHANGE MY FIGHTING STYLE NOW, I'LL LOSE FOR SURE.

AND IF **THE SAME MOVE** ISN'T GOING TO DO ME ANY GOOD...

...HE JUST HAS TO COME AT ME HARDER AND FASTER THAN EVER BEFORE.

THAT MUST BE WHAT HE'S THINKING.

IS THAT SO?

I SEE I HAVEN'T GIVEN YOU YOUR DUE RESPECT, ABEL REMNO.

COME AT ME.

I'LL TAKE YOU ON AS I WOULD A WORTHY RIVAL— WITH THE BEST OF MY BLADE-WORK!

FLIP

FLIP

STAB

STAB

CLENCH

HALT! LOWER YOUR BLADES!

STEP

WHA—?!

SHOCK

ON ACCOUNT OF RAIN, THE SWORDS-MANSHIP TOURNAMENT WILL BE SUSPENDED!

WHAT...? SUSPENDED?

I THOUGHT SO.

WELL, I SUPPOSE THAT'S THAT.

OH... YES, OF COURSE...

NOT THE SORT OF MATCH YOU'D RISK CARRYING ON IN A STORM LIKE THIS.

THIS TOURNAMENT'S SUPPOSED TO BE A FRIENDLY AFFAIR TO FOSTER GOOD RELATIONS WITH EACH OTHER.

HOW ABOUT IT, PRINCE ABEL?

I'D LIKE NOTHING MORE THAN TO FINISH THIS MATCH...

...BUT THE EARLIEST CHANCE WILL LIKELY BE DURING THE NEXT TOURNAMENT THIS WINTER.

DO I HAVE YOUR WORD WE'LL CROSS SWORDS AGAIN?

SHAKE

YOU BET WE WILL.

PRINCE ABEL!

DASH

SURPRISE

PRINCESS MIA?

JUST A LITTLE MORE, AND YOU WOULD'VE ***HAD*** HIM!

THAT WAS AMAZING! AND YOU WERE SO VERY CLOSE!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUT IN THE RAIN...?

SOME PETTY WRETCH MUST NOT HAVE WANTED YOU TO WIN! THEY WISHED FOR RAIN, I'M SURE OF IT!

NO, UMM...

IF WE'D KEPT GOING, I PROBABLY WOULD'VE—

INTERFERING WITH AN HONORABLE MATCH—HOW ***DARE*** THEY?!

BY THE WAY.

AH!

PLIP

I WISH IT WOULD RAIN AND SPOIL THE WHOLE EVENT!

PRINCE SION TURNED DOWN MY LUNCH, AND NOW HE'S ON A PATH TO WIN? THIS CANNOT STAND!

IN THE PREVIOUS TIMELINE, WHEN MIA SPENT THE TOURNAMENT ALONE...

RUUUMBLE

Come on, rain...

Rain...

SUSPENDED ON ACCOUNT OF RAIN?! I DID IT!

DAH-DAAAAAAH

プンスコ FUME

YOU WERE SO, SO CLOSE!

Princess Mia!!!

MIA, OF COURSE, HAD FORGOTTEN ENTIRELY THAT THE "PETTY WRETCH" WHO'D WISHED FOR THE EVENT TO BE SPOILED WAS NONE OTHER THAN HERSELF.

Tearmoon Empire

WHILE THE PAIR OF PRINCES SHOOK HANDS AND SWORE TO ONE DAY CROSS SWORDS AGAIN...

はう……

Side Story

...MIA WAS SULKING.

MUNCH

MUNCH

TAP

PRINCESS MIA! PRINCESS MIA!

WHY DID PRINCE SION HAVE TO BARGE IN AND RUIN EVERY-THING?!

HUFF

HUFF

HUFF

I WORKED SO VERY HARD TO MAKE THAT LUNCH BOX FOR PRINCE ABEL!

HM?

LIORA?

THIS...

...IS VERY...

...TASTY!

MY!

THE MEAT...

...WAS COOKED...

...JUST...

...RIGHT!

NOTE: LIORA'S GRADING SYSTEM IS BASED SOLELY ON THE QUALITY OF THE MEAT.

YOU'RE MY ONLY ALLY, LIORA!

MUNCH

...

MUTTER-

ALL THANKS TO ME!

YOU'LL NEVER FIND ANOTHER SANDWICH SO DELICIOUS AND AESTHETICALLY PLEASING!

AND FOR ALL MY EFFORTS, IT'S STILL FALLING APART. I'LL HAVE TO WORK ON THAT NEXT TIME.

FLIP

PERHAPS A TOUCH MORE ACIDITY?

MAYBE A SLIGHTLY SWEETER FLAVOR PROFILE WOULD'VE BEEN BETTER?

FLIP

HM...

PRINCE ABEL!

SORRY FOR THE DISTRACTION, PRINCESS MIA.

WAIT... WHY AM I ASSUMING THERE'LL BE A NEXT TIME?

SHUDDER

YES, BUT WE'RE ALL DONE.

DIDN'T PRINCE SION HAVE, UMM... BUSINESS WITH YOU?

ARE YOU FINISHED ALREADY?

BA-DMP

PRINCE ABEL...

I COULDN'T LET THE LUNCH YOU MADE FOR ME WAIT ANY LONGER, AFTER ALL!

IT'D BE SUCH A SHAME TO NOT FINISH IT BEFORE BREAKTIME IS OVER.

SMILE

HUH! WHAT A FUNNY LOOKING SANDWICH.

WHY ARE YOU SITTING HERE?!

HMM...

STARE...

THIS SHAPE, THOUGH...

IT IS A HORSE!!!

DING!

OH, I GET IT! A HIPPO!

BELIEVE ME, MISS ANNE...

...THAT IS ***NOT*** THE PROBLEM.

CHATTER

IT'S ALL MY FAULT...

IF ONLY I'D BEEN JUST A LITTLE MORE CAREFUL SHAPING THE EARS...

CHATTER

HOW RUDE OF ME! MY MISTAKE.

!!

HA HA, IT'S A ***HORSE,*** PRINCE SION!

SINCE PRINCESS MIA'S IN THE HORSEMANSHIP CLUB, YOU KNOW?

OH, A HORSE!

RUDENESS IS WHAT I'VE COME TO EXPECT FROM YOU!

TH-THINK NOTHING OF IT... OHO HO HO...

THIS WAS ALL SUPPOSED TO BE FOR PRINCE ABEL!

CHOMP

THE COURSE OF EVENTS CONSPIRED TO MAKE ME OFFER HIM LUNCH...

...BUT THAT DOESN'T MEAN I **WANTED** HIM TO EAT IT!

HUFF

HUFF

THIS IS... DELICIOUS!

!

SMILE

PRINCESS MIA, YOU AND THE OTHERS HAVE OUTDONE YOURSELVES! IT SEEMS COOKING IS YOUR FORTE!

WHAT AN ASTONISHINGLY WELL-MADE SANDWICH!

IT REALLY IS, ISN'T IT?

...

It'll keep me going through the afternoon's matches!

Really, this is just so good!

WELL, IF YOU'RE **THAT** IMPRESSED, I SUPPOSE I WON'T BE OFFENDED IF YOU PARTAKE!

A GENUINE COMPLIMENT LEAVES PRINCESS MIA'S EGO PRECARIOUSLY OVER-INFLATED.

OHO HO HO HO

Short Story

A Day Forgotten, and a Day Unforgettable

A Day Forgotten, and a Day Unforgettable

Mia had a reputation for possessing a remarkably powerful memory. That is not, however, to say that the odd fact or two didn't slip her mind...regularly. The incident involving Princess Rania of Perujin Agricultural Country was only the tip of the iceberg—truth be told, when Mia wasn't deliberately concentrating, a striking proportion of her experiences were forgotten in short order. This held doubly true in the case of memories that Mia herself desperately *wished* to forget.

This is the story of a day that played a role in Mia's journey toward the guillotine, of passing coincidences and small but vital details, most of which Mia had excised from her memory by the time they actually mattered.

Saint-Noel Academy's swordsmanship tournament featured all the lavish spectacle of a well-orchestrated festival. Occurring shortly before the students departed for summer vacation, the event brought rows of food stalls into the academy grounds and saw the student body delight in the festive atmosphere. It was a day of smiles, laughter, and all-around merriment—and yet one girl who plodded her way through that liveliest of occasions looked anything *but* cheerful.

"Ugh... What a drag," muttered the girl. Her name was Chloe Forkroad, and she was perhaps one of the most plain and unobtrusive students at the academy.

Chloe heaved a sigh. Her attitude couldn't have been more at odds with the festivities around her as she glanced about, her expression deeply dejected. If she'd had her way, she would've spent the day holed up in her room in the school dorms. Wandering through the bustling stalls alone, on the other hand, felt like some sort of particularly cruel punishment. Chloe found absolutely nothing to enjoy in the experience...but unfortunately for her, as the daughter of a merchant, she had little choice in the matter. The chance to observe Saint-Noel's swordsmanship tournament in person was a rare one, and when her family sent her pocket money and told her to tour the stalls and see what was for sale, Chloe's fate was sealed.

I'm sure my father meant that I should find some friends and see the sights with them, Chloe reflected. Being utterly friendless, however, her father's good intentions felt more like a burden than anything else. She couldn't bring herself to make him worry, though, and so she wound up sampling the local offerings by her lonesome...not that she could bring herself to enjoy the food, given the circumstances. All she'd really accomplished was exhausting her reserves of physical *and* emotional stamina.

"Ugh," Chloe groaned once more. "I should find somewhere I can take a rest," she muttered, her voice feeble with exhaustion as she made her way toward her steadfast sanctuary: the school library.

Thankfully, the rest of the school grounds were all but deserted—presumably on account of everyone being over by the tournament venue. There was something lonely about the desolate hallways, but to Chloe, they felt like a long-awaited breath of fresh air.

As she strolled toward the library, Chloe heaved another long, heavy sigh. "Maybe I should just go back to my room for the rest of the day. I've already seen the stalls, after all, so why not? Yes, I'll do just that— *Eek*!" she shrieked as, mid-mutter, she collided with something. Her glasses were knocked to the ground, and as Chloe frantically crouched down to search for them, a voice rang out from overhead.

"*Excuse* me! Has no one taught you to *look* where you're walking?" said the voice. Chloe couldn't make out the figure's features without her glasses, but she could tell that it was a girl—and that she wasn't alone. "Oh? Aren't you that *commoner*?" the girl continued, her voice suddenly dripping with contempt.

"A commoner? Heavens, no!" said another of the girls. "Her place in the peerage was properly bought and paid for by her merchant parents, I assure you!"

"Oh, of course," said the first girl. "How silly of me to forget!"

"U-Umm," stammered Chloe. She knew that, most likely, she'd had the misfortune of colliding with a young noblewoman. She also knew that she had to apologize—and fast—but she just couldn't seem to put her thoughts into words. Meanwhile, she saw the blurry form of one of the girls bend down to pick something up off the floor.

"I can hardly believe you wear these unsightly things," the girl said as she toyed with Chloe's glasses. "Has keeping your nose shoved in a book day in and day out ruined your eyesight? What a dullard."

"And just look at her *hair*! It's so drab and bushy," said another of them as she walked over. She reached down, mussing up Chloe's hair before cackling. "How was someone like *you* even allowed into Saint-Noel? And to think I was told this school valued tradition and social standing!"

"Ah..." Chloe grunted. The girl's words felt like a knife to the heart. She knew she had to say something—*anything*—but she found herself speechless. It hurt to breathe, much less talk, and just as her eyes began to grow hot and damp with tears, a new voice rang out.

"You there! What do you think you're doing?!"

The cry echoed down the hallway, and the pack of noble girls froze. A moment later, Chloe heard their breath catch in unison. She looked up to see the blurry shape of a person with strikingly bright, platinum blonde hair.

"P-Princess Mia?" gasped one of the girls.

"Wh-What are you doing *here*?" asked another.

Their shock was understandable. Chloe was familiar with that name. It was that of the Imperial Princess, Mia Luna Tearmoon, who happened to be one of Chloe's classmates.

"I believe *I* asked *you* a question first," said Mia, her voice carrying the clear tone of a burning rage. "Allow me to reiterate: what, exactly, do you think you're doing?"

The noble girls found themselves drawing back as Mia advanced upon them. "W-We were, umm," one of them stammered. "Oh, yes! We were aghast that a commoner like her would be allowed to witness the heroics of Prince Sion...so we took her glasses..."

"Oh? The heroics of Prince Sion, you say?" said Mia. "I take it, then, that you are his fans?"

"Y-Yes, of course! We admire him in much the same way we admire you, Your Highness!" said one of the girls, now openly attempting to flatter the princess.

Mia's reaction was swift. "My! You *admire* Prince Sion! I see... Yes, I see indeed," she said, her voice faintly quivering. The cause of her tone was not hard to deduce: Mia was *enraged*.

Chloe, meanwhile, was unsurprised by her reaction. The noble girls had made a fatal error—one they could've realized in advance if they'd paused to think things through. When one stumbles across someone midway through an act of wrongdoing, the *last* thing they would want to hear is the villain attempting to claim some sort of fellowship with them. Mia, surely, had been irked by the attempt.

And, just as Chloe had anticipated, Mia's rage grew more evident still as she stamped the ground with all her might. "I will *thank* you to return that girl's belongings to her, then begone from my sight!" she snapped. The noble girls jumped with shock, then fled the scene at top speed.

"Hmph! What a terribly disagreeable lot!" Mia muttered indignantly as she watched the noble girls beat their retreat. At that particular moment, fans of Sion were, in Mia's eyes, public enemy number one. The mere sight of them was enough to sour her mood in an instant...though for the record, Mia had only intervened at first because they had sounded like they were *enjoying* themselves—a fact which she simply could not abide.

How dare they gang up on a solitary girl like that? Sion's fans are as distasteful a bunch as I expected! Thank the moons I happened to pass by! Mia thought, feeling as if she'd just become a dispenser of righteous justice. *It's all* his *fault that I was forced to eat lunch alone! Grr! Curse you, Sion Sol Sunkland!*

"U-Umm..."

As Mia balled her fists in impotent rage, someone spoke up. Mia turned to look, and found a girl with a truly remarkable visage standing in front of her. The girl's thick, jet-black bangs hung down over her face, largely obscuring it and giving her an uncanny resemblance to a ghost! Now, Mia wasn't afraid of ghosts—no sir,

not in the least—but she *was* caught just ever so slightly off guard and may have let out an ever so slightly undignified squeal as a result.

"M-My, you're still here? Well then, umm... If you'd rather not get wrapped up in this sort of disturbance, perhaps you'd be better off going somewhere with more people around?" suggested Mia, largely to change the subject preemptively. A moment later, a thought struck her, and she quickly added, "Oh, and I'd most appreciate it if you kept my presence here between the two of us."

Mia had, after all, spread a rumor or two that she'd be eating lunch with Sion. If anyone knew she was *here* at this time of day, it would expose the fact that she'd eaten alone and would put her in a very uncomfortable position.

"Well then—thank you, and good day!" Mia concluded, then departed without missing a beat, leaving the girl—that is, Chloe—behind, lips flapping in an effort to spit out words that just wouldn't come.

In the end, that was the only time that Chloe and Mia managed to make contact with each other. From Mia's perspective it was an incredibly petty incident that was quickly forgotten and incited no changes in her life, dramatic or not. No bonds of friendship were forged between the two of them, and for that matter, Mia never even realized that the girl she'd saved was her classmate.

Chloe, meanwhile, didn't consider it an especially significant event either. She felt a certain sense of lingering regret at having been unable to thank Mia for her help, but there wasn't anything she could actually *do* about it. Mia was the princess of an empire—she wasn't the sort of person a girl like Chloe could casually strike up a conversation with. In the end, Mia remained as distant a presence in Chloe's life as ever.

All that being said, on the day she learned that a revolution had occurred in the distant Tearmoon Empire—the day she learned that her former classmate, the princess who'd rescued her from her petty bullies, had been executed—Chloe felt a slight but distinct pang of sadness. It felt tragic to her that the girl who'd helped her, the girl she'd never been able to thank, had been beheaded just like that.

The world at large viewed Mia as an irredeemable villain, but Chloe had just never been able to see her that way. After all—would a true villain have saved her like Mia had? Perhaps Mia's actions back then had been nothing more than a whim, but the fact that Chloe had been saved as a result remained. And yet, in spite of her capacity for kindness, nobody stepped forth to argue on Mia's behalf and advocate for mercy. Something about that fact made Chloe as sad as could be, and the fact that she herself had been unable to help left her frustrated. The bitter disappointment and shame she felt in that moment would linger in Chloe's mind for the rest of her life.

And so, time marched on...

It was the day of the swordsmanship tournament. Lunchtime had arrived, and Chloe somehow found herself eating alongside Mia and her companions. She had been absolutely convinced that Mia and Abel would be dining as a duo until shortly beforehand when Mia's attendant, Anne, asked her to join everyone for the meal. Chloe had accepted the offer, and soon found herself enjoying her lunchtime to the fullest. Between eating the sandwiches she'd made with her peers and squealing with glee at the delightful friendship between the two princes, Chloe was having more fun than she'd ever imagined possible. *I'd almost think I'm dreaming,* she thought. It seemed like the only reasonable explanation.

Chloe had never had many friends. She'd grown capable of conversing with the other students little by little since she met Mia, yes, but speaking with someone and calling them a true friend were two very different matters. She still had very few people with whom she'd be able to spend a day like this, and Mia was still her *only* book buddy. As such, she'd been certain she'd wind up eating her lunch alone.

The thought hadn't particularly bothered Chloe, to be clear. She'd already toured the stalls with Mia et al., and they'd all made their lunches together. On the whole, Chloe was *not* isolated. Eating alone for a single day shouldn't have even registered for her—and yet, now that she was actually eating with the group...Chloe was having the time of her life. Perhaps that was why a question sprung into her head, and why she couldn't resist the urge to voice it.

"Umm, by the way, Princess Mia...are you sure it's all right for me to be here?" Chloe asked, but then finally caught herself and swallowed back the second question on her mind: *are you sure it's all right for me to be this happy?* Not only was Mia, the Princess of the Tearmoon Empire, in attendance, but the Prince of Sunkland, Sion, and the Prince of Remno, Abel, were also present. This was a gathering of powerful figures from all across the continent, and Chloe felt terribly out of place.

Mia, however, answered Chloe's concerns with an amused chuckle. "My, wherever is *this* coming from? You looked like you were enjoying yourself so just a moment ago! In any case, anyone who helped make these sandwiches has earned the right to eat them as part of our group—and besides," Mia said, pausing for just a moment to look Chloe in the eye, "the two of us are book buddies, are we not? Of *course* it's all right for you to be here!"

Mia finished on a definitive note, smiling at Chloe. The gesture made Chloe as happy as could be, and yet...though she didn't quite understand why...it also made her just a little sad. Sad, for reasons she couldn't comprehend.

"Oh? What's wrong, Chloe?" asked Mia. "You look a little under the weather..."

"N-No, I feel fine," said Chloe, swallowing back the inexplicable emotion that was welling up within her. For all her efforts, though, she couldn't help herself from saying just one thing—something that felt incredibly important. "Thank you very much, Princess Mia," said Chloe with a smile. "I've enjoyed myself so, so much today... So much that I never, ever want to forget it."

Mia returned Chloe's grin with one of her own. "Oh, you exaggerate, I'm sure. But in any case, the day has only just begun! Prince Abel and Prince Sion's match still awaits us—we cannot afford to relax just yet!" said Mia, fists clenched with determination. "It will be a battle for the ages, I'm sure of it!"

"Hee hee! Yes... Yes, I'm sure it will," Chloe said, her smile as bright as could be.

After everyone finished their lunches, a sudden recollection struck Mia, and she departed in the direction of the schoolhouse. She glanced around here and there as she strolled through the halls, almost as if she was searching for someone.

"Hmm... She's nowhere to be found," Mia muttered to herself. "I suppose that's to be expected, with all the changes that have occurred. And here I thought I'd have the perfect chance to expose the misdeeds of that wretched Sion's fans... A shame," she added with a frustrated sigh, then shook her head. "In any case...seeing as

I've been granted the chance to do it all differently, I hope that she, too, has found a way to enjoy herself today."

A girl who's name she'd never learned had suddenly sprung into Mia's mind. She was a dreary-looking girl with long hair that covered her face, and though they'd only met once, Mia found herself hoping that, wherever she was, she'd found her life at the academy at least a little more fulfilling than the last time around.

"Princess Mia? The match is about to start!" called out a voice. It was Chloe—Mia's book buddy—jogging down the hallway to meet her. Something about the smile on her face made Mia feel a slight sense of relief, though she couldn't possibly imagine why.

"Oho ho ho—yes, I'm sure now. She *must* be enjoying herself somewhere, just like Chloe is," Mia said to herself. Of course, as long as she was *somewhere* at Saint-Noel, Mia knew they might very well bump into each other someday. Perhaps circumstances would even conspire to let them become friends!

At the very least, I can say with confidence that she's not *one of Sion's fans...and that means there's no reason why the two of us couldn't get along,* Mia thought to herself with a nod.

This was the tale of a friendship that wouldn't be—a chance meeting that led only to a tragic end. And yet this was the tale of a friendship forged—a bond that would bring about a new ending entirely. What that ending might be, however, is a question none can answer...at least, not yet.

Fin

♦ Afterword ♦

Congratulations on the publication of the manga's fourth volume!

This is the author of the original novels, Nozomu Mochitsuki.

I'd like to thank Mizu Morino for once again drawing such a delightful rendition of Mia's adventures. I just love seeing the faces that Mia makes whenever an unexpected obstacle springs up! Hilarious stuff.

Now then—this volume presents a large number of what have turned out to be surprisingly rare events in the story of *Tearmoon Empire*: hot-blooded battle scenes! I'm referring, of course, to the battle between the two princes and the lonely battle that Keithwood carries out behind the scenes.

I hope that everyone who chose to read this volume will enjoy it to the fullest!

Nozomu Mochitsuki

Here it is—the fourth volume! Thank you very much for continuing to read this series.

This whole volume ended up revolving around the swordsmanship tournament. The scene where everyone makes their lunch boxes is one of my favorites from the original work, and I was really happy to finally get to draw it! (Though of course, we still haven't reached the end of the original work's first volume yet!)

By the way—a certain personified you-know-what that shows up every now and again in Mia's imagination has been turned into a plush keychain! I have to admit, I laughed my head off when I received an extremely seriously worded proposal for the project (complete with a design sketch) totally out of the blue. Don't worry—it's a perfectly soft and cushy plushie that definitely couldn't chop off any heads! If any of his (her?) fans happen to be reading this, you might want to look into getting one for yourself...

That's all for now! See you in volume 5!

~Mizu Morino

TEARMOON EMPIRE (MANGA) VOLUME 4
by Nozomu Mochitsuki (story) and Mizu Morino (artwork)
Original character designs by Gilse

Translated by Tristan K. Hill
Edited by Samantha J. Moore
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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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